

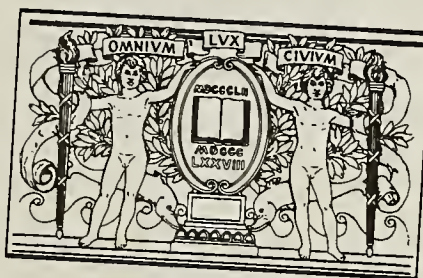
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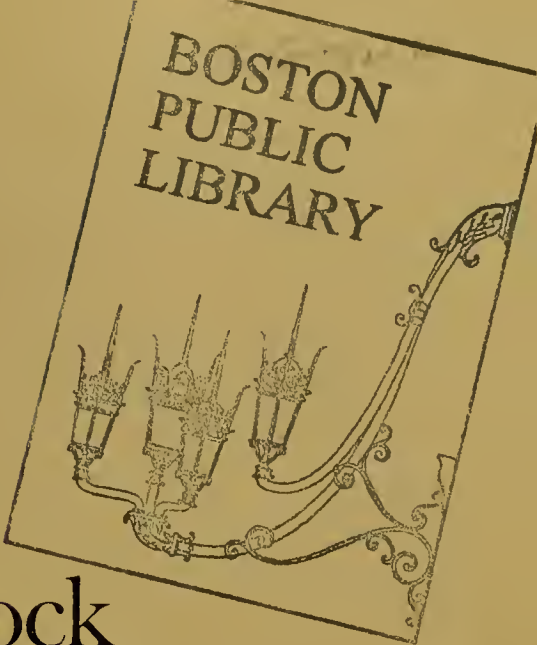


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Blackstone Block

Street Network

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Boston Landmarks Commission

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Report of the Boston Landmarks Commission
on the potential designation of
THE BLACKSTONE BLOCK HISTORIC STREET AND SIDEWALK NETWORK
CONSISTING OF MARSHALL STREET, CREEK SQUARE
MARSH LANE, SALT LANE, SCOTT ALLEY AND
PUBLIC ALLEY 102
AND THE SIDEWALKS BOUNDED BY
UNION STREET, NORTH STREET, BLACKSTONE
STREET AND HANOVER STREET
as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975

Approved by Marcia Myers 3/1/83
Executive Director Date

Accepted by Paul Harnell 3/1/83
Chairman Date

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1.0 LOCATION OF THE PROPERTY

1.1 Street Locations (Public Ways):

Creek Square - from 10 Marshall Street, south then east, to 70 Blackstone Street;
Marsh Lane - from 35 Union Street, east, to 9 Creek Square;
Marshall Street - from 43 Union Street, northeast, to 149 Hanover Street;
Public Alley No. 102 - from 9 Marshall Street, easterly in a crescent, to 8 Creek Square;
Salt Lane - from 25 Union Street, east, to 19 Creek Square;
Scott Alley - from 22 North Street, north then northeast, to 21 Creek Square;
Union Street sidewalk east side - from North Street to Hanover Street;
North Street sidewalk north side - from Union Street to Blackstone Street;
Blackstone Street sidewalk west side - from North Street to Hanover Street;
Hanover Street sidewalk south side - from Blackstone Street to Union Street.

Ward: 3

Precinct: 6

1.2 Area in Which the Property is Located:

This historic street network is located in downtown Boston in the Blackstone Block, directly north of the Faneuil Hall Marketplace/Dock Square area. It is bounded by North, Union, Hanover and Blackstone Streets. Marshall Street and Marsh and Salt Lanes lead out to face City Hall on the west, Marshall Street and Creek Square face the Fitzgerald Expressway (Central Artery) on the east.

The Blackstone Block contains two 18th-century buildings, the Union Oyster House and the Ebenezer Hancock House; the Boston Stone; the Haymarket Pushcarts; and the new Bostonian Hotel. The buildings in the block are predominantly brick 19th-century mercantile structures containing offices, shops and restaurants/bars. There are presently some vacant upper stories and a couple of vacant storefronts.

The main pedestrian underpass to the North End is located at Hanover and Blackstone Streets, the Haymarket "T" station provides metropolitan area train and bus service one block away. Route 93, the Fitzgerald Expressway, connects Boston with points north and south and with East Boston and Logan Airport via the Callahan and Sumner Tunnels.

1.3 Maps Showing Location: attached.



CENTRAL/DOWNTOWN BOSTON



BLACKSTONE BLOCK

BLACKSTONE BLOCK

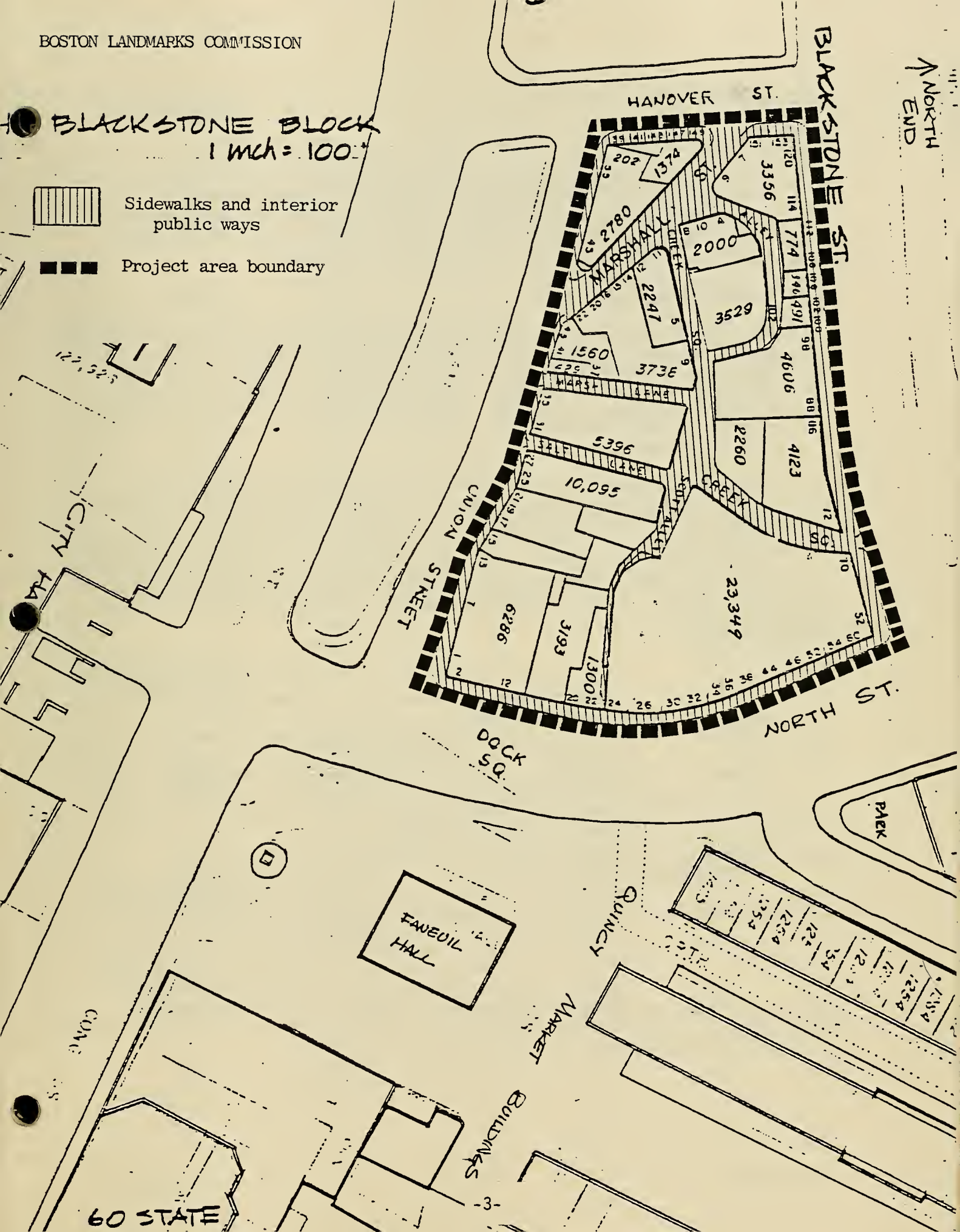
1 inch = 100'



Sidewalks and interior public ways



Project area boundary



North
End

BLACKSTONE ST.

HANOVER ST.

UNION STREET

NORTH ST.

DOCK SQ.

FANEUIL HALL

MARKET BUILDINGS

QUINCY ST.

PARK

60 STATE

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

2.1 Type and Use

The network of streets and sidewalks in the Blackstone Block is an area which comprises a single feature: the largest intact (unwidened and unstraightened) pattern of original 17th-century public ways remaining in Boston today. Presently the narrow, interior public ways function primarily as service alleys and pedestrian passages.

2.2 Physical Description

The Blackstone Block's interior streets form winding, intimate and organic (not geometrically laid out) channels relieving the pattern of close-packed buildings on the site. One of Boston's narrowest public ways, Scott Alley, is a 4' wide passageway at North Street. Only two intersections extend in width to almost 25', including sidewalks. All of the interior streets are self-contained in the block, none longer than about 200' per straight stretch.

The interior ways and outer sidewalks of the street network contain approximately 29,250 square feet, or 25% of the total area of the block's 2.69 acres. Notable historic features of the street network include granite curbing and granite slab sidewalks, plus six Boston Edison early 20th-century streetlights. One- to seven-story brick buildings border the public ways almost exclusively, contributing to their quaint, and human scale. A more detailed description of each public way follows:

Marshall Street

Location:	Union Street, between Nos. 43 and 45, northeasterly to Hanover Street, between Nos. 149 and 151.
Length:	Approximately 200'.
Width:	Approximately 16' near ends, widening to about 24' at the mid-section, building-to-building.
Surface:	Asphalt on old granite blocks on a concrete base (largely disturbed by subsequent utility cuts); sidewalks concrete, granite slabs north side from Union Street to Creek Square intersection.
Curbing:	Granite, none where there are granite sidewalks.
Intersections:	Marshall Street, between Nos. 10 and 11, south side only. Alley No. 102, between Nos. 9 and 10, south side only.
Features:	Red brick Freedom Trail line inlaid from Union Street to Blackstone Street, south side; some granite entrance strips remain in sidewalks. No sidewalk or curb in front of No. 10. Some overhanging signs above first floor level. Bracketed Edison Light fixture with replacement shade and clipped neck, over a fire escape opposite No. 10. See Hanover Street above re. 50/50 light standard.

Creek Square

Location: Blackstone Street, between Nos. 70 and 72, westerly then northerly to Marshall Street, between Nos. 10 and 11.

Length: Approximately 350' total, northerly portion about 210', easterly portion about 140'.

Width: Approximately 14' near Marshall Street, widening from intersection with Public Alley No. 102 to about 24' at the intersection with Salt Lane, and narrowing again to about 16' near Blackstone Street, building-to building.

Surface: Asphalt on old granite block on a concrete base (largely disturbed) from Marshall Street to Scott Alley; new granite blocks (1982) on asphalt base from Scott Alley to Blackstone Street. Very narrow concrete sidewalks on northerly portion. No sidewalks at parking lot behind Ebenezer Hancock House or northerly side of Bostonian Hotel park. Brick sidewalks (1982) flush with street grade on easterly portion.

Curbing: Granite where there are concrete sidewalks, granite pavers form curb course on easterly portion.

Intersections: Public Alley No. 102, opposite No. 9, and just north of the rear of No. 98 Blackstone Street, east side. Marsh Lane, between No. 9 and the rear of No. 33 Union Street, west side. Salt Lane, between the rear of Nos. 31 and 27 Union Street, west side.

Features: Boston Edison 50/50 standard with acorn top, northerly corner of Creek Square and Salt Lane. Lamp bases (3) installed 1982 on north sidewalk of the easterly portion of Creek Square.

Marsh Lane

Location: Union Street, between Nos. 35 and 37 easterly to Creek Square, between No. 9 and the rear of 33 Union Street.

Length: Approximately 120'.

Width: Approximately 12' building-to-building.

Surface: Asphalt over old granite blocks, possibly undisturbed. Narrow sidewalks (about 2' wide), granite slabs south side and north side from Union Street to the rear of 14-22 Marshall. Concrete along the rear of 14-22 Marshall.

Curbing: Granite where there are concrete sidewalks.

Intersections: None

Features: Bracketed Edison Light with replacement shade, midsection, south side.

Salt Lane

Location: Union Street, between Nos. 27 and 31 easterly to Creek Square, between the rear of Nos. 27 and 31 Union Street, at bend of Creek Square and intersection with Scott Alley.

Length: Approximately 120'.

Width: Approximately 11' building-to-building.
Surface: Asphalt on old granite blocks on gravel base, possibly minimally disturbed. Sidewalks approximately 2' wide; granite slabs on the north, concrete on the south.
Curbing: Granite where there are concrete sidewalks.
Intersections: None.
Features: Boston Edison 50/50 standard, see Creek Square above.

Scott Alley

Location: North Street, passage under east side of No. 22, northerly to the rear of No. 15 Union, then curving northeasterly to the intersection with Salt Lane and the bend of Creek Square.
Length: Approximately 200'.
Width: Approximately 4' from North Street to the bend, then widening to about 16' north of the bend.
Surface: Granite blocks (1982) on sand base.
Curbing: None, longitudinal course of pavers forms border on each side.
Intersections: Merges with Bostonian Hotel arcade (private way), north of the bend.
Features: Bracketed clear glass globe fixtures (1982). Southerly portion is a passageway with Nos. 22 and 24 North Street abutting it and three second floor sections of the Bostonian Hotel passing over it.

Public Alley No. 102

Location: Marshall Street, between Nos. 9 and 10, easterly then southerly then westerly in a crescent to Creek Square, east side, opposite No. 9. Forms a rear alley for the buildings from 98 to 114 Blackstone Street.
Length: Approximately 200'.
Width: Approximately 12' at north end narrowing to about 10' at south end, property line-to-property line.
Surface: Asphalt on old granite and "Sicilian block" on concrete base. Concrete sidewalks behind Nos. 108-110 and 112-120 Blackstone Street.
Curbing: Granite, where there are sidewalks.
Intersections: None.
Features: Bracketed Edison Light over the rear entrance to 108-110 Blackstone Street, no shade. Bracketed Edison Light on south wall at south end, with rusted but original enameled shade. Boston Stone set into rear wall of No. 114-120 Blackstone Street facing north end of the alley.

Union Street Sidewalk

Location: North Street northerly to Hanover Street, east side.
Length: Approximately 450'.
Width: Approximately 5' widening in front of No. 13-1 to about 13'.

Surface: Brick (1970s) from North Street to Salt Lane; granite slab in front of No. 31-33, No. 45-55, and probably beneath asphalt patch at No. 37.

Curbing: Granite, none where there are granite slabs.

Intersections: Salt Lane between Nos. 25 and 31, Marsh Lane between Nos. 35 and 37, Marshall Street between Nos. 43 and 45.

Features: Red brick Freedom Trail line inlaid from North Street to Marshall Street; 1970s light standards (3) with square fixtures from North Street to Salt Lane.

North Street Sidewalk

Location: Union Street easterly to Blackstone Street, north side.

Length: Approximately 380'.

Width: Approximately 17'-20'.

Surface: Brick (1970s and 1980s).

Curbing: Granite.

Intersections: Scott Alley between No. 22 and No. 24, Bostonian Hotel arcade between No. 24 and No. 30.

Features: Round tree pits, some filled-in with brick paving; granite pavers (1982) at driveway to Bostonian Hotel and entrance to Scott Alley; granite street sign over Scott Alley entrance; Bostonian Hotel flags and awnings overhang sidewalk; 1970s light standards throughout with paired white glass globes.

Blackstone Street Sidewalk

Location: North Street northerly to Hanover Street, west side.

Length: Approximately 430' total length.

Width: Approximately 10' wide, narrowing to about 8' at No. 80.

Surface: Concrete, granite slabs at No. 72-86 and No. 98.

Curbing: Granite, none where there are granite slabs.

Intersections: Creek Square between Nos. 70 and 72.

Features: Granite entry strips in front of several buildings; corrugated metal canopies overhang sidewalk above first floor; granite pavers at Creek Square intersection (laid 1982); sidewalk holds Haymarket produce vendors (basically Thursdays-Saturdays).

Hanover Street Sidewalk

Location: Blackstone Street westerly to Union Street, south side.

Length: Approximately 150'.

Width: Approximately 9'.

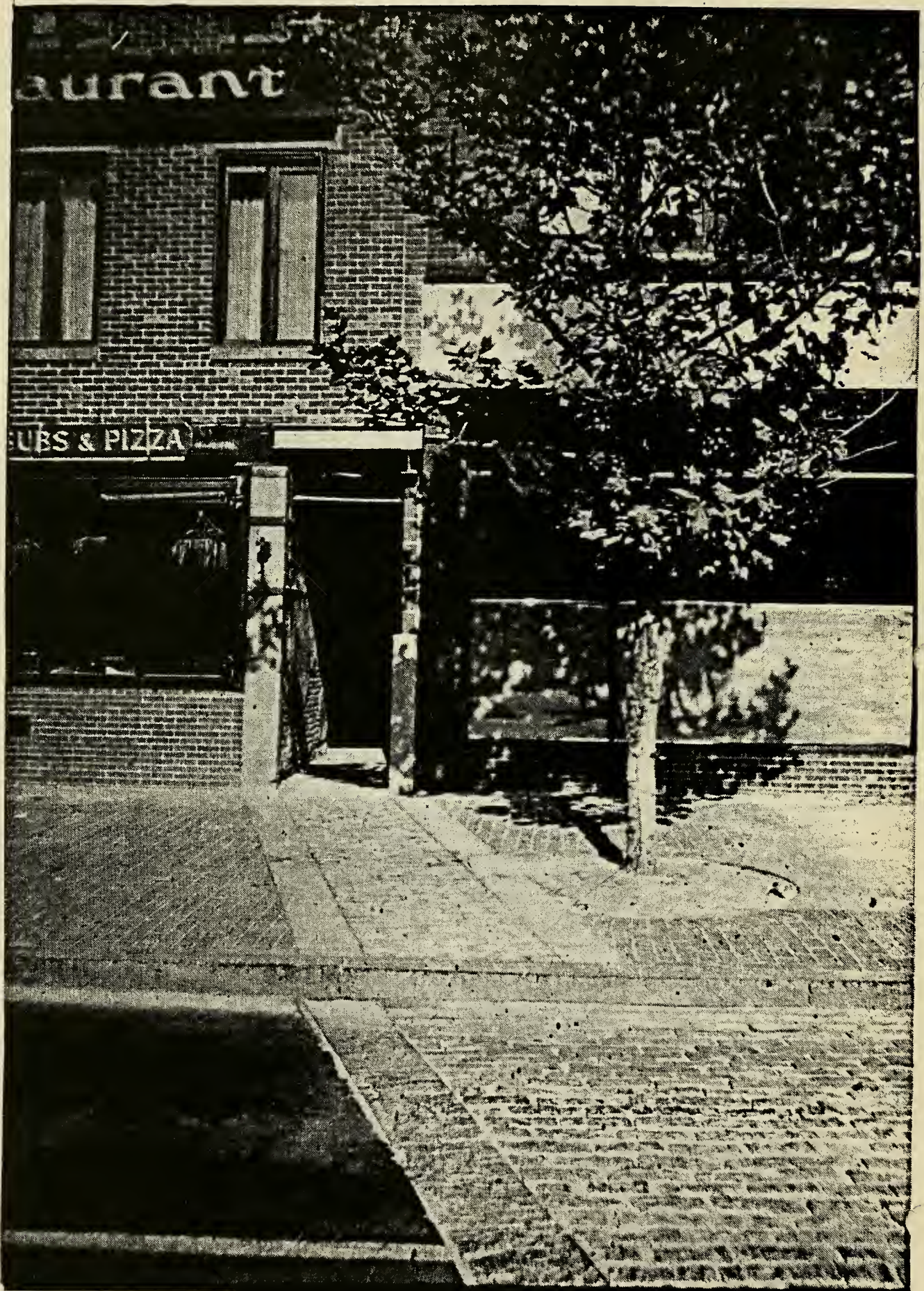
Surface: Concrete; granite slabs from Union Street to Marshall Street.

Curbing: Granite, none where there are granite slab sidewalks.

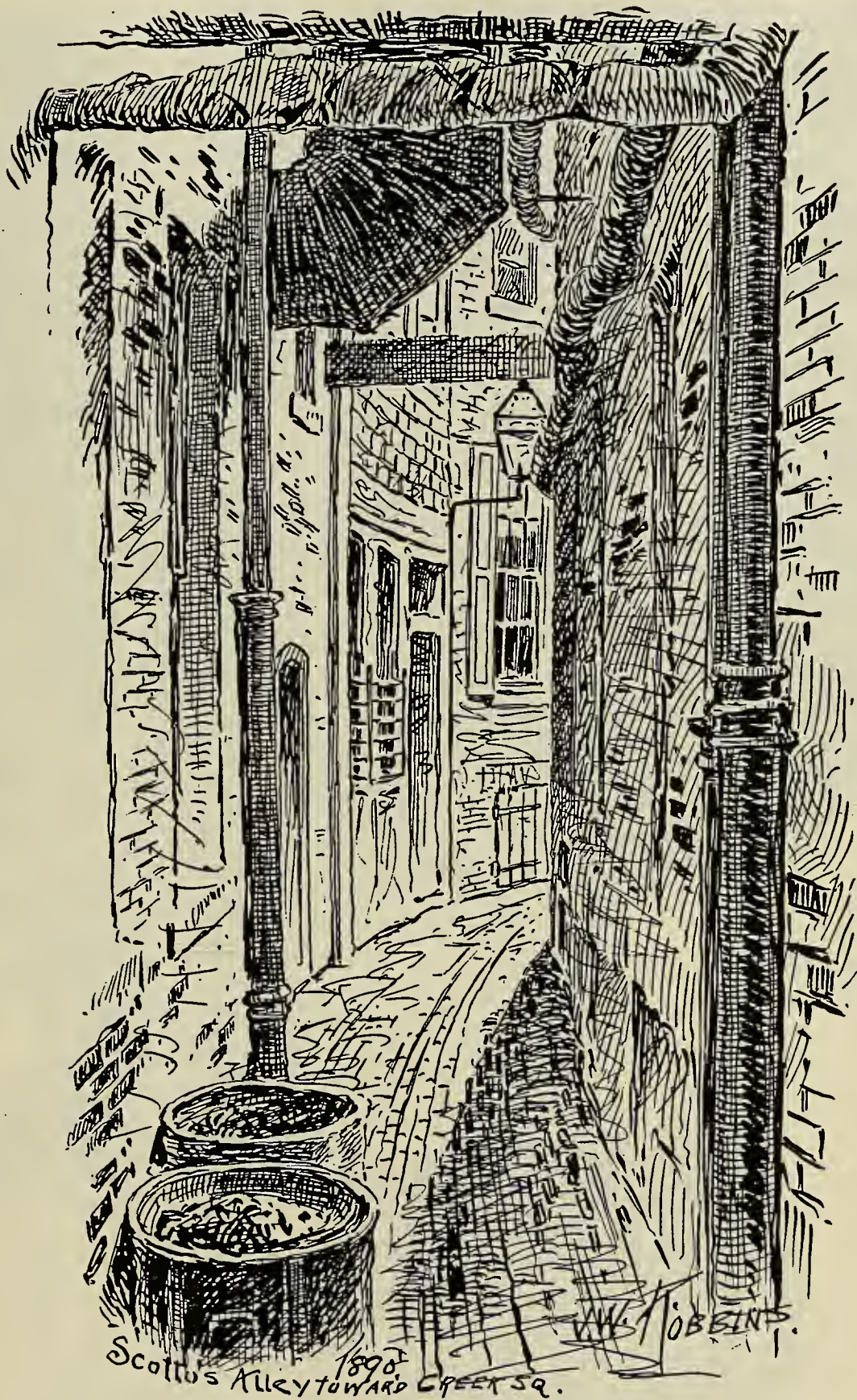
Intersections: Marshall Street between Nos. 149 and 151.

Features: Boston Edison 50/50 light standard (wood with iron core) with acorn top, east corner of Marshall Street.

2.3 Photographs: attached.



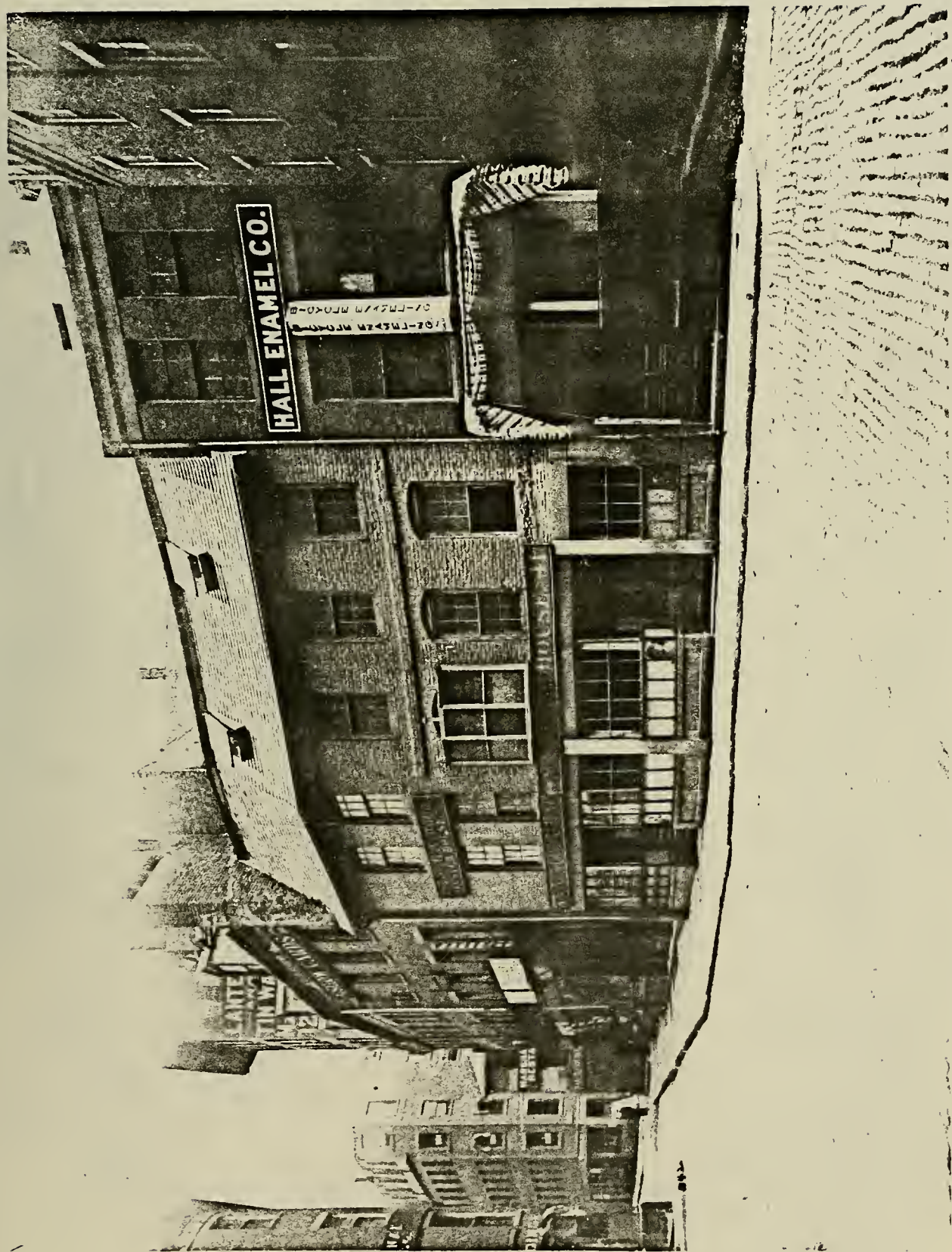
Entrance to Scott Alley passageway at 22 North Street (surround under construction and new granite paving, September 1982). Photo by Boston Landmarks Commission.



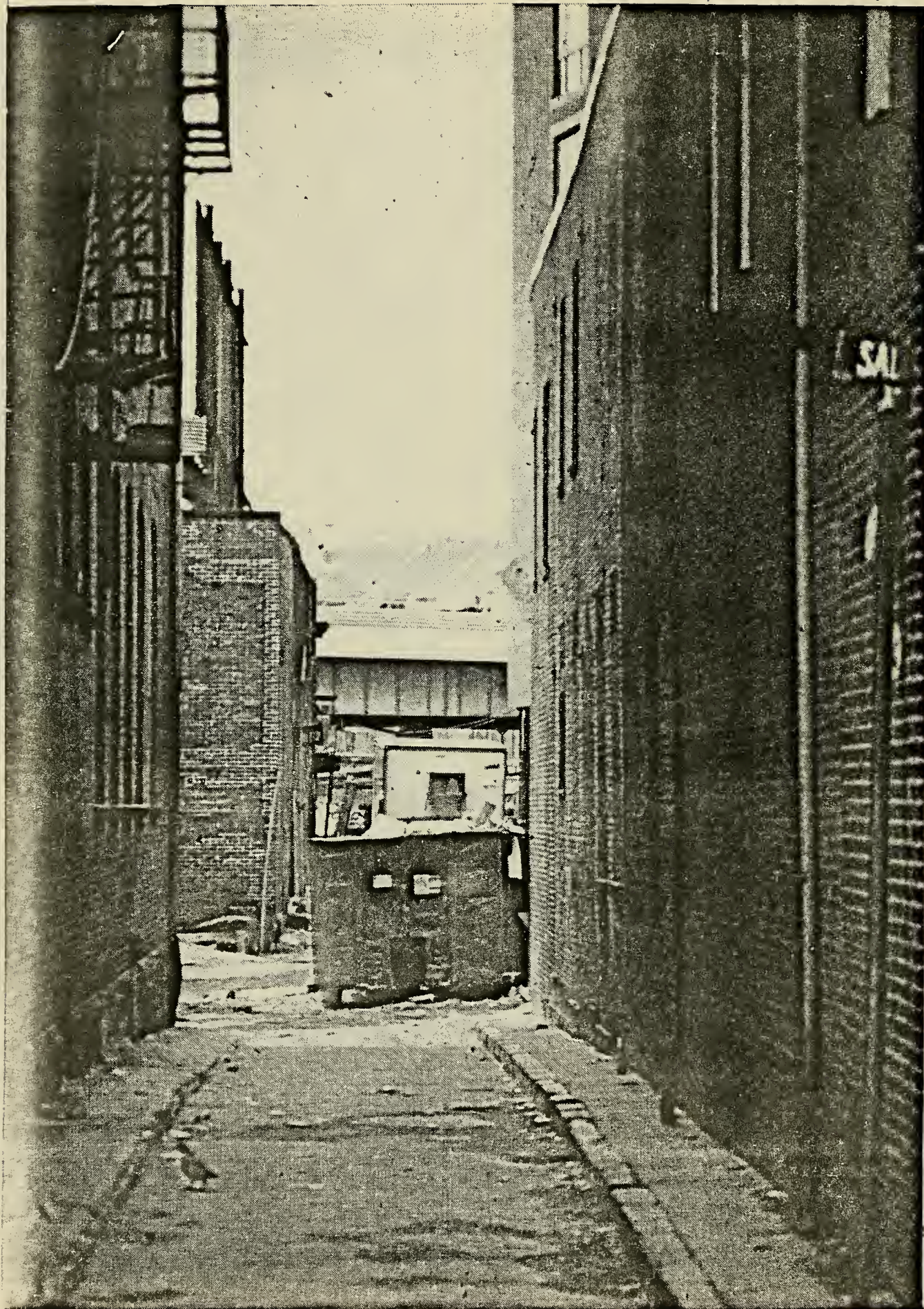
Scott Alley in 1890, viewed from North Street passageway, looking toward Creek Square. Buildings in this photo all are extant today. Courtesy of The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Blackstone Block c. 1967. Union Street from left to right, Marshall Street intersecting. Photo credit: Boston Redevelopment Authority/ Boston Landmarks Commission.

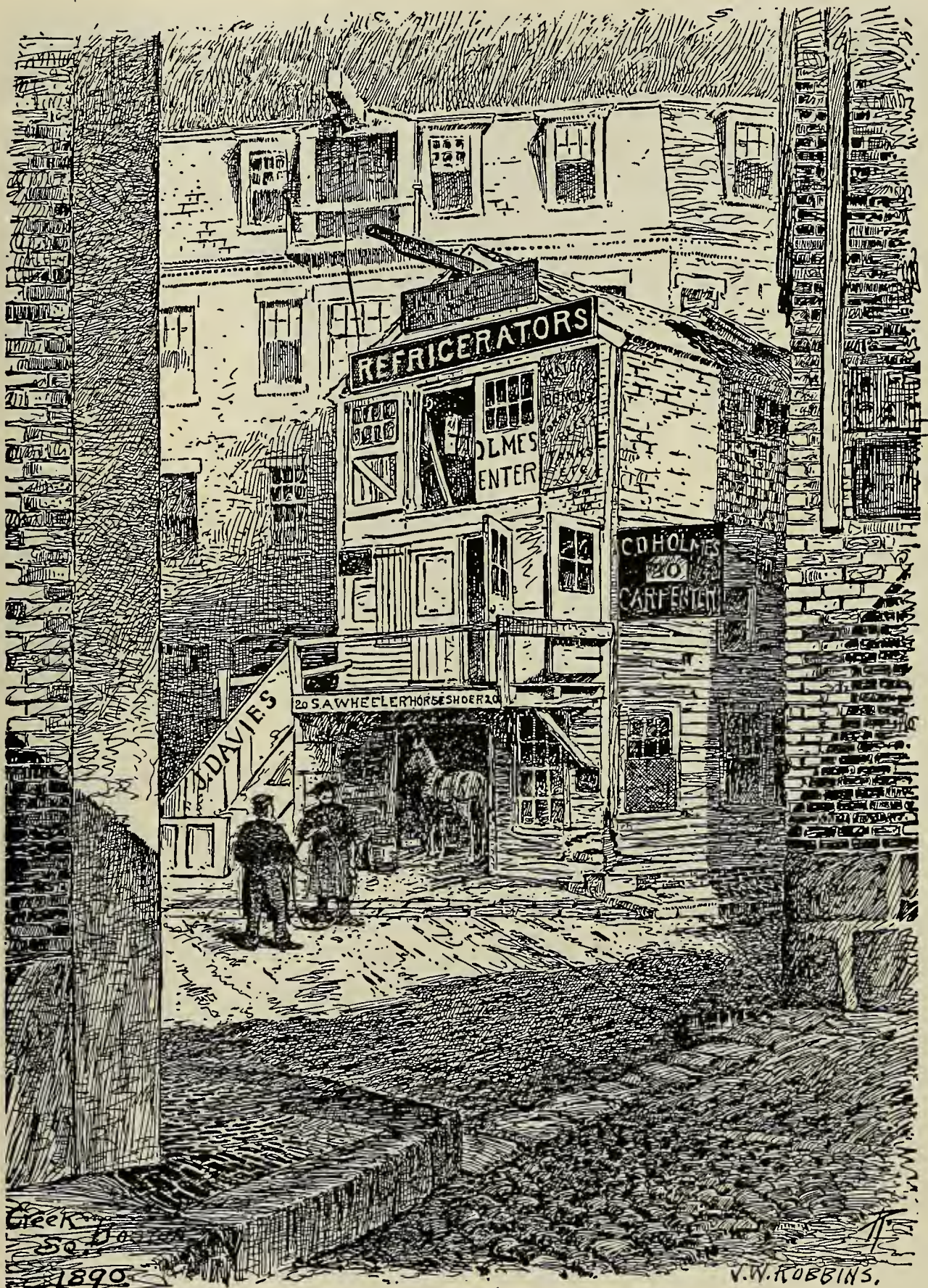




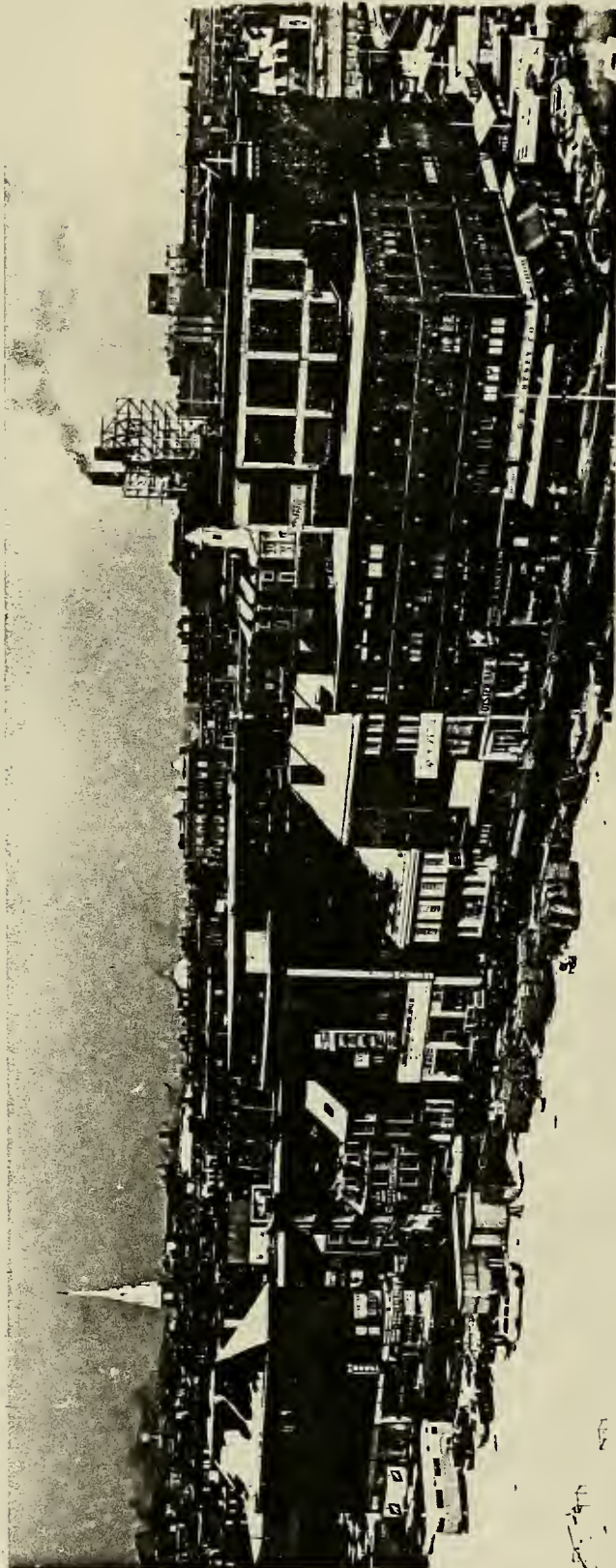
Union Street in the foreground, Atwood's Oyster House is the predecessor the Union Oyster House. Marshall Street is at the left, Marshall House Restaurant occupied the Ebenezer Hancock House. Photo undated, probably c. 1900; courtesy of the Boston Public Library Print Department.



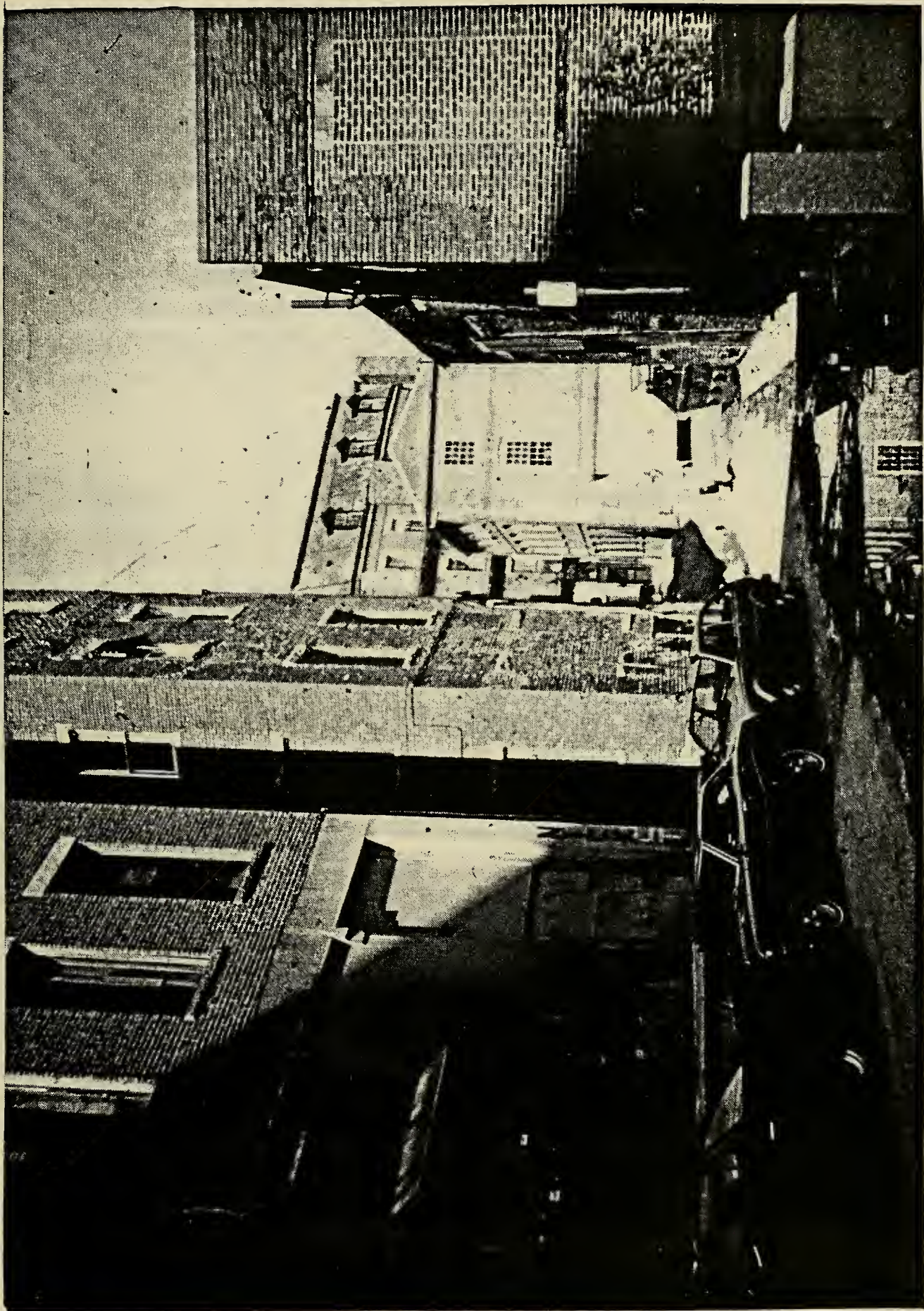
Salt Lane, looking east from Union Street toward Creek Square and Blackstone Street. Photo summer 1982, by the Boston Landmarks Commission.



Creek Square in 1890, viewed from Salt Lane. The small central building was constructed on the site formerly occupied by Scottow's Dock. The mansarded building behind it is 72-86 Blackstone Street. Courtesy of The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.



Blackstone Block c. 1967. Union Street runs from left to right, and North Street is on the right.
Photo credit: Boston Redevelopment Authority/Boston Landmarks Commission

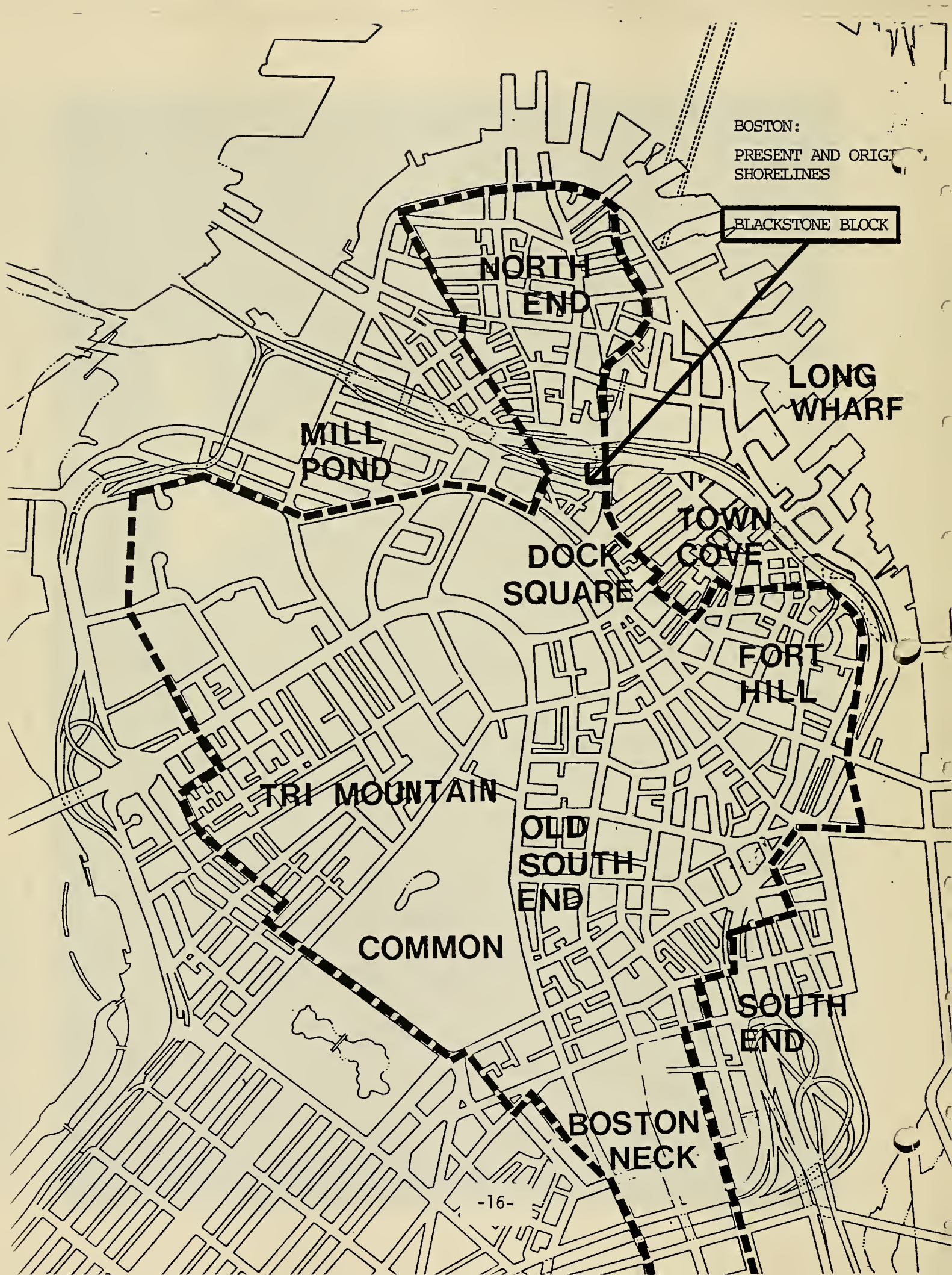


Creek Square looking north toward the Ebenezer Hancock House and Marshall Street. Photo September 1982, by the the Boston Landmarks Commission.

BOSTON:

PRESENT AND ORIG
SHORELINES

BLACKSTONE BLOCK



3.0 SIGNIFICANCE

The Blackstone Block street pattern is a unique Boston resource: an island in time surrounded by the modern city, which allows us to look back 350 years to see the physical pattern of Boston as it began, and as it was built up before the 20th century.

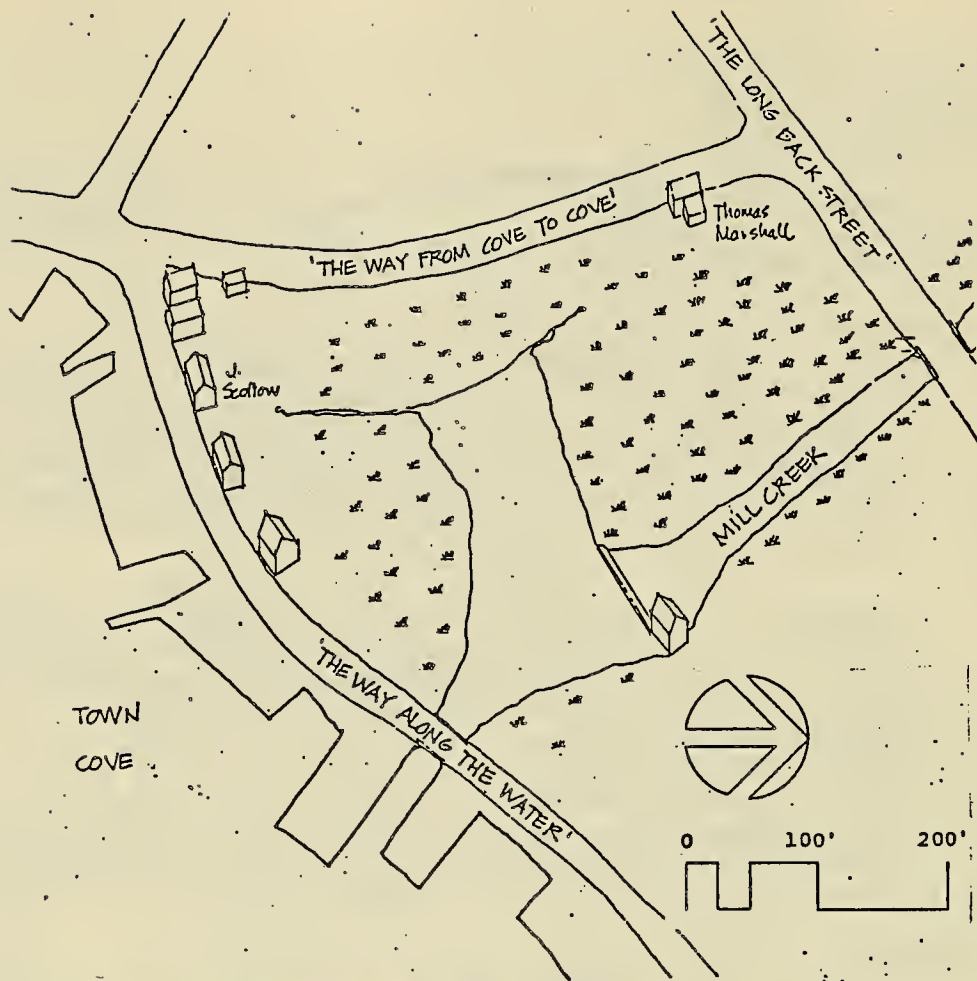
The present streets were virtually established by 1676. Union and Hanover Streets may even date back to Boston's first year of settlement, 1630. Later refinements represent minor changes: the eastern extension of Creek Square over the landfill where Scottow's Dock had been (1803), the replacement of the navigable and subsequently planked-over Mill Creek by Blackstone Street (1833), the joining of the separate ends of Public Alley No. 102 (before 1798), and the widening of Union, Hanover, and North Streets (since 1827).

Marshall Street, Scott Alley, Creek Square, Marsh Lane, Salt Lane, and Public Alley No. 102, the self-contained, interior streets of the Blackstone Block, are extremely significant as Boston's largest extant network of unwidened and unstraightened original, colonial streets. The importance is heightened because the scale of the small old city streets is maintained by the Blackstone Block's low-rise brick buildings, including two which predate the Revolution. Further significance is added by the existence of some late 19th-century granite slab sidewalks. Six early 20th-century Boston Edison streetlights are undoubtedly the most extensive street-lighting system installed on the site to date.

3.1 Boston's 17th-Century Form and Development

It is quite remarkable that central Boston retains a 17th-century remnant as intact as the Blackstone Block's street network, since the city's form today bears almost no resemblance to its original topography. Given the irregular natural shape of the Shawmut peninsula, it is also remarkable that the Massachusetts Bay Colonists, who moved here in 1630, transformed Boston into the colonies' largest town and leading seaport before 1700.

The land mass of Shawmut was practically an island, connected to the mainland by the neck, a very narrow strip of land at its southern end. In itself Shawmut was divided again; the North End was cut off from the original South End by a tidal stream which very soon became the Mill Creek. Three hills and three coves were the peninsula's main features: Beacon Hill (the Trimount) on the west, Copp's Hill in the North End, and Fort Hill on the south. Beginning around 1800, portions of the hills were leveled to fill the coves at their bases: Mill Cove on the west, Great or Town Cove on the east, and South cove near the neck. Hence the Blackstone Block, once bordered on the north by the Mill Cove and on the south by the Town Cove, is now more than half a mile from the waterfront. Similarly, its eastern water border, the Mill Creek, has been filled to become Blackstone Street.



1640 MASSING OF THE BLACKSTONE BLOCK, drawn by Miguel Gomez Ibanez



Blackstone Block streets and lots, 1676. Drawn by Nancy Seasholes from the Clogh Collection of maps, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Long before the land was expanded, shipping and trade were Boston's main activities, and town development centered on the harbor. Town Cove was first wharfed out in 1641 and from that time until 1711, when Long Wharf was completed, the Town Dock was Boston's business center. In 1643, grants were given to a group of businessmen to develop grist mills and deepen the Mill Creek to make it a navigable canal connecting the Mill Pond and the Town Cove. The area which is now called the Blackstone Block began to be platted out and sold by the town as early as 1644. Its marshy center was developed into a commercial dock in the early 1650s. Drawbridges were privately operated at Hanover and North Streets, providing sole land access over the Mill Creek to the North End. They later became fixed bridges, but smaller vessels could still pass through.

Boston was laid out casually in the 17th century, without an overall or formal plan like some cities had, such as Philadelphia. The spontaneity delighted John Josselyn who arrived in 1663 and observed:

"The chief edifice of this city-like town is crowded on the sea banks, and wharfed out with great labor and cost; the buildings beautiful and large, some fairly set forth with brick tile, stone and slate, and orderly placed with semely streets, whose continuous enlargement presageth some sumptuous city."

Shawn Charles, Esq. A Topographical and Historical Description of Boston, 1817.

At almost the same time (1664), however the Royal Commissioners found the form of Boston less appealing:

"Their homes are generally wooden, the streets crooked with little decency and no uniformity."

Thwing, Annie Have. The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston 1630-1822, 1920.

Certainly Boston's early street system was random, laid out as the town developed and as places needed to be, and could be connected. Cows, however, should not be credited for creating the streets. As George Weston pointed out in Boston Ways:

"Cow paths? Hardly, unless the cows were drunk. Besides, one of the lanes is so constricted (Scott Alley) that only a very narrow cow, however sober, could negotiate it."

A problem for both 17th-century visitors and later historians was that streets did not receive official names until 1708. However, historians who have studied property records in the Book of Possessions (1630s and 1640s) have helped to place and date early street layouts, especially George Lamb, compiler of Records Relating to the Early History of Boston Vol. 2, Supplement: "Series of Plans of Boston Showing Existing Ways and owners of Property, 1630-1635-1640-1645" (Boston Municipal Printing Office, 1905).

According to Lamb, Union and Hanover Streets were in place in 1630, the initial year of Boston's settlement. North Street was laid out by 1645, and by this date Mill Creek was channeled and bridges were in place at Hanover and North Streets.

The first town records mentioning streets in general and the Blackstone Block area in particular, seem to be the following:

1636, 4th, 8 mo: "At a meeting of the overseers, it was ordered that from this day, there shall be no house at all be built near unto any of the streets or laynes therein, but with the consent of the overseers, for the avoyding disorderly building to the inconvenience of streets and laynes, and for the more comely and commodious ordering of them upon the forfeiture of such sum as the overseers shall see fitting."

1636, 17th, 8 mo: Orders for laying out "sundry ways, regulating their width."

"Also a layne to be left to goe from the water side upon the banke, or neare to goe along to the Mylne cove, of the same width."

"Item - that the streete way from the gates next James Everitt's, toward the Mylne, is to runne straight along in an even line to John Pemberton's house, and to rainge between Thomas Marshall's house and Serjeant Savage's, and to bee within the street between payle and payle on each side, two poles broad."

"A layne to goe from cove to cove, between Thomas Paynter and Thomas Marshall's, one pole and a half between payle and payle."

These records have been interpreted by Annie Haven Thwing, in The Crooked & Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston 1630-1822, to include Union Street as one of the streets laid out in 1636.

Early street names were varied and descriptive:

Union Street (officially named 1708, earlier called):

- "street that goes to the pond"
- "street to the dock"
- "Goodman Matson's lane"
- "fore street leading to Starr Tavern"
- "street by the Green Dragon Tavern"
- "street from cove to cove"

Hanover Street (officially named 1708, earlier called):

- "Houchins Lane"
- "the way leading out of the town of Boston to the water mill"
- "the broad street"
- "the town street"
- "lane by the name of the back street leading from the Mill Bridge to the upper part of Prison Lane"
- "the long street called Mill Street leading from the ferry as high up in the town as to the house formerly Jeremiah Houchins"

Marshall Street was donated to the town by Thomas Marshall whose house and half-acre garden were perhaps the earliest developments on the Blackstone Block, sited on property located along Union and Hanover Streets. A prominent citizen as well as a shoemaker, Marshall was chosen to be the ferryman to Charlestown c. 1635. In 1636, he was a town Selectman and was considered to be among Boston's wealthy residents. He offered "Marshall's Lane" to the town in 1652, as a shortcut across his property from Union Street to the Hanover Street Bridge. Apparently, the offer was recorded before Marshall Street officially became a public way.

According to Samuel Clough, another serious 20th-century researcher of 17th-century Boston deeds, Marshall Street was laid out by 1676. Salt Lane, Marsh Lane, both ends of Public Alley No. 102, Scott Alley, and the section of Creek Square between Marshall Street and Marsh Lane also were developed between 1648 and 1676 according to the Clough maps.

Scott Alley was originally named Scottow's Alley for Joshua Scottow. Besides developing the marsh into an active commercial dock in the early 1650s, Scottow helped shape the Blackstone Block's street pattern. He owned property at about what is now 16-20 Union Street, and Scottow's Alley was a footpath for access to the dock, cited as an easement in 18th-century deeds. Thwing states that the alley passed under the house that Scottow built. Today, similarly, the entrance to Scott Alley is a doorway in the building at 20-22 Union Street (constructed c. 1820, upper stories rebuilt 1982). The shortening to the name Scott Alley may refer to Scottow and also a Joseph Scott who owned property in the area a century after Scottow. Salt Lane was developed by Scottow, too, as a cartway for dock customers.

Captain Joshua Scottow was a merchant, a man who was interested in town affairs in his early life. Later (c. 1691) he wrote A Narrative of the Planting of the Massachusetts Colony. Justin Winsor wrote:

"But he grew despondent as he grew in years; the change of dress, manners, and social customs from those of the first generation seemed to him a sure presage of destruction, and he poured out his sorrow in a book of lamentations called Old Man's Tears for their own Declensions...(1691)."

Today, Scottow is viewed as a prime 17th-century developer of the Blackstone Block area. Dock activity was directly related to the mixture of housing, retailing, manufacturing, and warehousing that characterized activities there in the 1600s. People lived and worked in the one- and two-story wooden buildings clustered around the dock, set close together facing the winding, narrow interior streets.

Not much is known about early Boston street paving. A topping of oyster shells was sometimes used, and early accounts refer to something called "pebble". Street maintenance and repairs were constant issues to the town from the earliest settlement onward as these excerpts from the Town Records indicate:

1641: The first order for maintenance of highways. "The richer sort of inhabitants shall afford three days work of one man (except such as have teams). The men of middle estates two days, and the poorer sort one day, according to the discretion of the surveyors. Every team is to afford one days work, under penalty of s.2 a day for each man that is defective, and s.8 if carts be defective."

1666: Scavengers Orders. "That noe person whatsoever shall upon the penalty of 5 shillings for every default suffer any stones, clay, timber, firewood, bords, clapboards or any other thing to lay above 48 houers which might annoy ye streets.

That noe inhabitant shall throw forth or lay any intrales of beasts or fowles garbidge of Carrion dead dogs or ratts dead beasts or any other stinking thing in any highway ditch or Common belonging to this towne but are enjoined to bury ye same for the preventing of annoyance thereby and allsoe yet noe person shall throw forth dust or dung, shreeds of cloth or leather, tobbacko stalkes or any other thing which may tend to the annoyance of the streets upon penalty according to ye discretion of ye Selectmen further it is ordered for the prevention of annoyance to the Town, all garbidge, beast entralls &c. are to be throwne into the Mill Creek over the Mill Bridge upon penalty of 20 shillings for every default, and every other person is to observe said order on said penalty."

March 11, 1671 or 1672: "Orders about paveinge the streets and Cart Wheelles were respited for another yeare upon consideration of all the Carters of the towne theire ingagement each with his teeme or Cart to give a dayes worke for preparation of the high ways, as the surveyors shall direct."

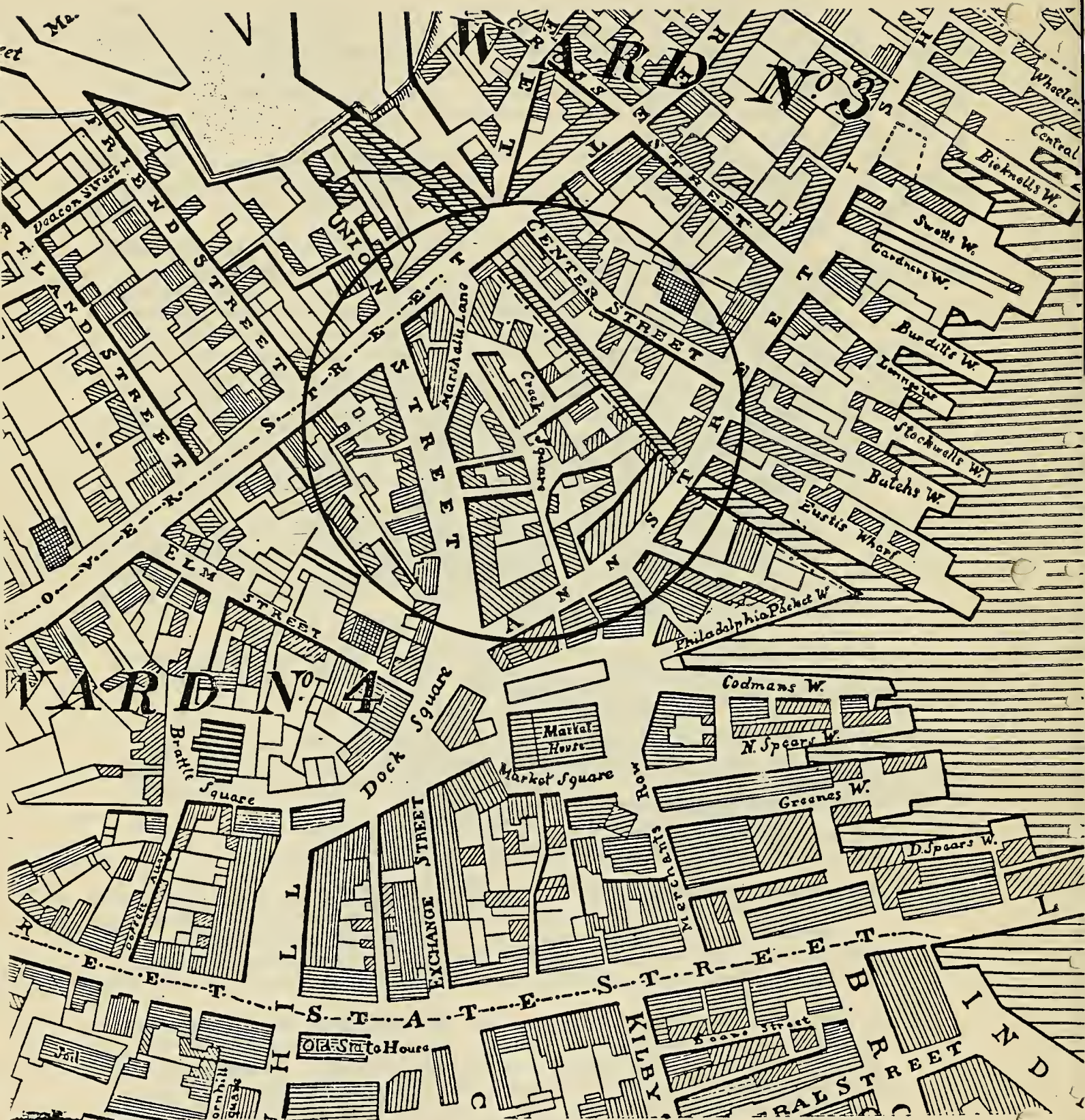
It wasn't until March 17, 1713 that Town Records cite an assessment of abutters for paving streets, apparently replacing the donation of labor each year by the carters.

Street lighting (in the form of 310 English glass globe lamps set on standards) was not provided by the town of Boston until 1773. Before that, night travelers carried lanterns and some individuals hung pitch buckets or lamps in front of their buildings.

3.2 Blackstone Block Street Development 1700 to the Present

Documentary evidence indicates that Scottow's Dock was land-filled in the 1790s. By that time colonial period brick buildings, similar in style to the remaining Union Oyster House (c. 1730, 41-43 Union Street) and Ebenezer Hancock House (c. 1767, 10 Marshall Street), had replaced many of Boston's less sophisticated, more fire-prone, wooden structures.

By the time the dock disappeared, the Mill Pond also had become obsolete; it was ordered to be filled-in in 1807. By 1814, Hale's map indicates that the Mill Creek was covered by wooden planking. Creek Square (formerly Creek Lane) was extended east from Scott Alley, to what is now 70 Blackstone Street, in 1803. In 1823, this portion of the street was named Hatter's Square, indicating the prime retail activity in the area.



DETAIL OF THE BLACKSTONE BLOCK. From J. G. Hales, "Map of Boston in the State of Massachusetts" (Boston, 1814)

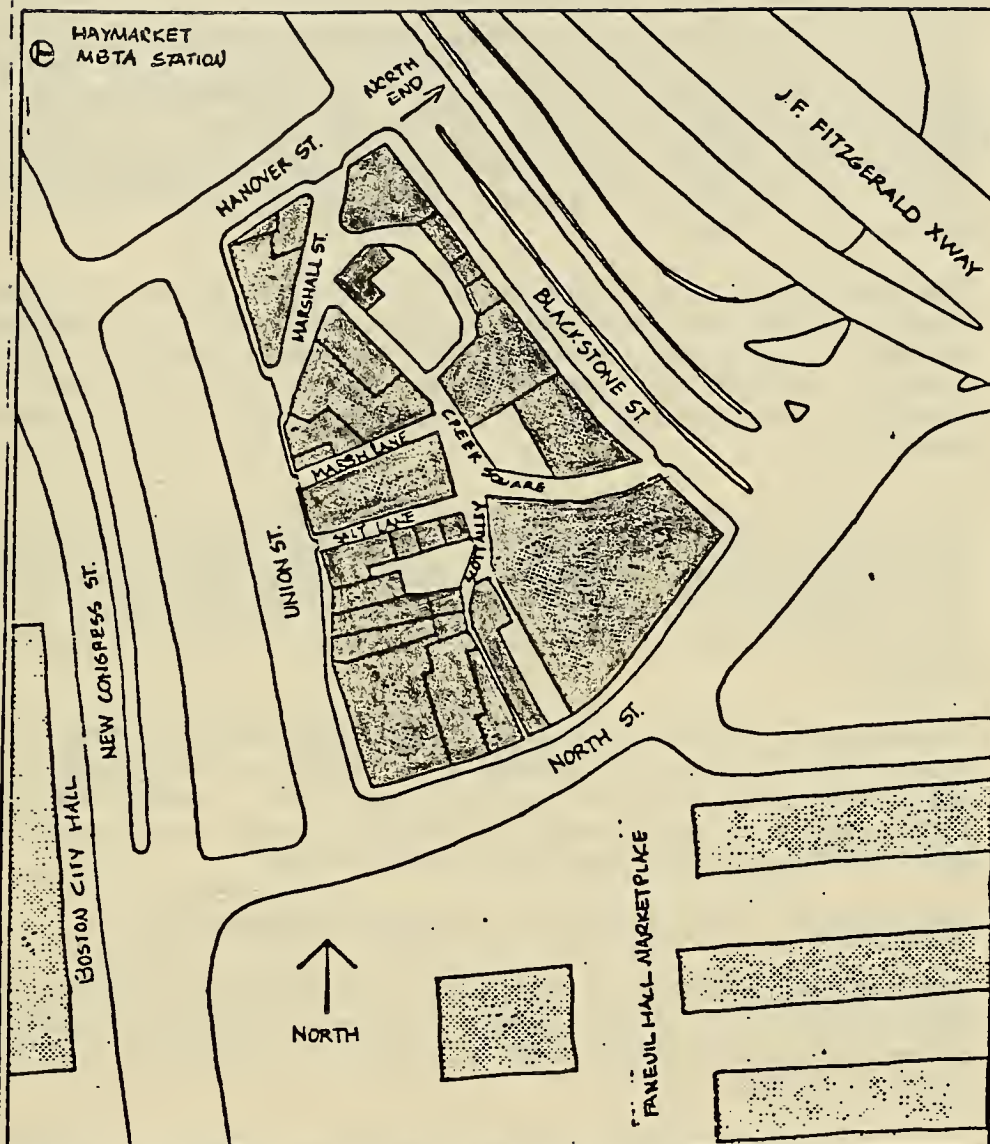
From 1826 to 1855, the northern part of Creek Square was called Hancock Row, after the c. 1785 development of brick buildings John Hancock erected behind his brother, Ebenezer's, house (Hancock Row buildings razed 1942, site currently a parking lot).

Blackstone Street was named in 1834, on landfill created c. 1831-1833. The name gives official tribute to the Reverend William Blackstone (also spelled Blaxton), who is considered to have been the Shawmut Peninsula's first white inhabitant. In 1625, he settled near a spring on the western slope of Beacon Hill.

With the filling of Scottow's Dock and the Mill Creek and with the redevelopment of the Town Dock for Quincy Markets (1824-1826), this part of central Boston became more retail and market oriented. New four- to six-story brick mercantile buildings rose along Blackstone Street, and the interior streets declined to secondary importance.

The Blackstone Block's present character dates to the 1800s. By the last quarter of the 19th century, Creek Square held several carpentry shops that made store fittings, such as butcher blocks, ice boxes, and corned beef tanks for provisioners in the nearby markets. Retail clothing and furniture dealers mingled with food sellers in the buildings which faced onto North, Union, Hanover, and Blackstone Streets. Gaslights illuminated Boston's streets until almost the turn of this century. The City's earliest electric lights, visible in old photos of Faneuil Hall Square, were harsh and temperamental carbon arc lamps. Public Alley No. 102 became an officially laid out part of the Blackstone Block street pattern in 1899, called Hancock Row, as it encircled the backs of those structures. Actually, the ends of Public Alley No. 102 had been in place since at least 1676, according to the Clough maps. Early Boston Edison lights, still extant in the Block, date from the early 1900s.

In the 20th century the decline of the interior streets of the Blackstone Block continued, turning them almost completely into service alleys. The buildings in the area had their secondary (side and rear) windows and doors bricked in. Following years of economic depression in the 1930s, upper floors of several buildings along Blackstone Street were razed, saving the owners from paying taxes on vacant space. The automobile caused congestion in downtown Boston after World War II, and suburban shopping centers and the Central Artery part of the Fitzgerald Expressway (built 1951) became preferred solutions to urban problems. Further in keeping with planning for a revitalized city, the Scollay Square, Cornhill and West End areas were torn down, and replaced by the much larger parcels of urban renewal areas. The name Blackstone Block was applied to the small streets and land parcels left as an island, surrounded by Government Center, the Central Artery, and Faneuil Hall Marketplace--in an attempt to relate this remnant of the old city to its new, much larger-scaled neighbors.



1932 MAP OF THE BLACKSTONE BLOCK, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

3.3 Urban Design Significance

The interior street network of the Blackstone Block comprises the largest, most intact network of original streets remaining in Boston today, virtually all established by 1676. City street records indicate that neither the earliest portions of Salt Lane, Marsh Lane, Scott Alley, Creek Square, Public Alley No. 102, Marshall Street, nor their later extensions, have ever been widened or straightened. The surrounding perimeter streets, Hanover, Blackstone, North, and Union, have been widened since their development in the 1600s (and early 1800s in the case of Blackstone Street). However, the street alignments follow the original 17th-century transportation pattern for these three streets and the Mill Creek. Furthermore, the outer sidewalks still contain a quantity of 19th-century granite.

The buildings of the Blackstone Block line the streets. Viewed individually, they span 250 years and many architectural styles. Collectively, they present a strong and harmonious urban design feature. The buildings enhance the winding, intimate streets with almost unbroken warm brick, humanly-scaled borders, giving the area a flavor more European than American.

The commercial nature of all these buildings and their bricked-in doors and windows facing the interior streets also present a special urban design opportunity. Reopened, they could greatly increase the activity and pedestrian ambience of the Blackstone Block streets. Even left as they are, the doors and windows are clear evidence of earlier uses and lifestyles.

Furthermore, the Blackstone Block is particularly important in its context, located in the center of Boston since 1630, and representing in its resources, a microcosm of Boston's evolution. Today, the contrasting nature and scale of adjacent Government Center and Faneuil Hall Marketplace make the Blackstone Block even more unique.

3.4 Relationship to the Criteria for Landmark Designation

The Blackstone Block historic street and sidewalk network is a physical feature which is clearly eligible for individual landmark designation, under the criteria established in Section 4, Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as follows:

- a. It comprises a major contributing feature in the Blackstone Block National Register District;
- b. It is a feature which best represents Boston's urban form during the colonial period, as reflected in the street layout of the colonies' largest city at that time. It is significant as such to the city, the Commonwealth, the New England region, and the nation;
- c. It is a feature representative of urban development from the colonial period which embodies distinctive characteristics which are inherently valuable for study.

4.0 ECONOMIC STATUS

4.1 Current Assessed Value and Property Tax:

This information is not relevant to the subject of tax exempt public ways.

4.2 Current Ownership and Status:

The Blackstone Block historic street and sidewalk network is owned by the City of Boston. It comes under the jurisdiction of the Public Works Department, the Public Improvements Commission, and the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

5.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

5.1 Background

For information on the development of this central area of Boston, see Sections 3.1 and 3.2 above.

Three Boston Redevelopment Authority projects have affected the Blackstone Block. Government Center superblocks replaced the old winding streets of the Scollay Square and Cornhill areas in the 1960s. The Downtown Waterfront-Faneuil Hall Urban Renewal Plan was approved in 1964 and amended in 1965, to be in effect for a period of 40 years. The plan has special provisions to address design review for all proposed changes in the "Historic Faneuil Hall-Blackstone Area" which it cites as significant to the city, state, and nation. Finally, the opening of the adjacent revitalized Faneuil Hall Marketplace (1976) has focused development interest on the Blackstone Block.

5.2 Current Planning Issues

Real estate speculation has increased in the Blackstone Block recently and is currently high due to the opening of the new \$18 million Bostonian Hotel (1982), on the corner of North and Blackstone Streets. To date several potential rehabilitation projects have failed to materialize due to high asking prices for properties. Subsequent development projects are in the planning stage, particularly for 1-13, 15, 17-21, 25-27 and 31-35 Union Street, 11-12 and 14-22 Marshall Street, and the parking lot on Creek Square behind the Ebenezer Hancock House. The Haymarket Pushcarts, located on Blackstone Street since at least c. 1921, continue to draw large crowds on the Thursday-Saturday market days. The Pushcart Association is currently formulating plans to improve market operations.

The Boston Landmarks Commission, supported by a \$15,000 grant from the Browne Fund, has prepared design recommendations (as of summer 1982) for public improvements to the Blackstone Block's interior 17th-century street network. The plans focus on appropriate special paving and lighting, sewer and water line improvements, and a historic marker system to make the area more accommodating to pedestrians. Already Scott Alley and a portion of Creek Square have been paved with new split-face granite Belgian blocks, the material used throughout this area in the late 19th century. The bulk of the improvements are scheduled for installation in 1983.

Although the Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan was approved in 1964, the Boston Landmarks Commission has just begun (1982) to activate the Blackstone Block design review process therein, in conjunction with the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the City's Department of Inspectional Services. The plan primarily focuses on rehabilitation, new construction, sign review, and proposed demolition.

Development ideas voiced to date include upper story additions for the Blackstone Street row of buildings and other properties in the block. Real estate speculation has raised asking prices for Blackstone Block

property, reportedly in excess of \$70/square foot in one recent case. Since rehabilitation costs are estimated to be at least \$50-70/square foot, such development could substantially change the nature of this area from one of local markets, inexpensive office space, and support businesses to one of first class office space, and restaurants.

There also are plans for a hotel/office complex to be built on BRA Parcel 7 across Hanover Street from the Blackstone Block although a preliminary designation for a developer has been delayed.

Finally, some plans for the Block are affected by its listing, in 1973, as a district in the National Register of Historic Places. This requires any federal or federally licensed or assisted project to undergo the design review process required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Also, a 25% tax credit for rehabilitation may be available to developers of depreciable properties which are listed in the National Register. Listing in the National Register also puts the Blackstone Block in a new state register under the Chapter 152 amendment to Chapter 9 of the Massachusetts General Laws, which may trigger archaeological and design review.

5.3 Relationship to Current Zoning:

The Blackstone Block is zoned B-8, permitting dwelling and general business use with a maximum floor area ratio of 8.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

6.1 Alternatives

The Boston Landmarks Commission may choose to designate the Blackstone Block historic street and sidewalk network as an individual Landmark, and it may designate individual buildings in the block as Landmarks. The Commission also retains the option of not designating the street and sidewalk network.

6.2 Impact of Designation

Landmark designation would bring added recognition to the most intact 17th-century street pattern remaining in Boston. It would also give the Landmarks Commission a direct role in protecting the street network and sidewalks for the future, supplementing the existing National Register, state register and Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan protection. No changes could be made to the layout, materials or appurtenant features of the public ways without Landmarks Commission approval.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission has recommended that the Blackstone Block historic street and sidewalk network, as shown in the maps, Section 1.3, be designated as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975. The Standards and Criteria recommended for administering the regulatory functions provided for in Chapter 772 follow as Section 8 of this report.

8.0 GENERAL STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR PRESERVATION OF THE BLACKSTONE BLOCK HISTORIC STREET AND SIDEWALK NETWORK

8.1 Approach

The layout of the Blackstone Block street network, the oldest connected streets in Boston still in their original form, must be carefully preserved. Features and fixtures which represent integral changes through time, such as the narrow sidewalk configuration, granite sidewalks and curbs, and old streetlights, shall be retained, whenever possible. Alterations shall be compatible with the historic nature of the streets and the evolutionary character of the buildings which comprise the Blackstone Block streetscape and span 250 years of Boston architecture. Finally, consideration shall be given to alterations that improve the design, safety, and/or function of these streets.

8.2 Process

The Commission shall review any proposed changes directly affecting the streets and street right-of-ways. However, the Commission shall allow the Executive Director to issue Certificates of Exemption for routine maintenance and repair items.

A. Form and Layout

1. Original layout of the sidewalks and streets shall be maintained.
2. Consideration will be given to minor alteration if it can be shown that better site circulation is necessary and that the alteration will improve this without altering the integrity of the design.

B. Paving

1. Every effort shall be made to preserve paving materials which contribute to the historic and developmental aspects of the Blackstone Block streetscape. These include granite elements such as pavers, curbs, sills, steps and sidewalk slabs.
2. Resetting or otherwise repairing such materials shall be considered preferable to replacing them with new materials.
3. Deteriorated but integral historic paving materials shall be replaced with the same material or a material which approximates it as closely as possible.
4. Consideration will be given to alternate paving materials if they will assist in site maintenance or will improve safety factors, and if they do not detract from the original or later integral design concept.

C. Street Fixtures

1. Whenever possible, integral fixtures such as lighting and signs shall be retained.
2. Maintenance of fixtures shall not alter integral color, material or design except to improve street function or safety.
3. Architectural elements that are replaced shall be of the same or similar material and design of the integral features, if possible. Consideration, however, will be given to changes that will improve street function, safety, and/or maintenance without altering the integrity of the design.
4. Architectural elements may be removed if they are no longer functionally useful and if their removal will not alter to a significant degree the streetscape design.
5. Architectural elements may be added if they will not alter the integrity of the streetscape design, and are necessary for safety, are useful for maintenance, and/or will improve design, understanding, or usage.
6. Overhead elements which change the historic quality of the streets, such as canopies, overpasses, and floodlights are to be avoided, whenever possible, and minimized when needed to improve circulation or safety factors.

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